

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | AUGUST 2024

# TOASTMASTER®

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turned Olympian  
shares how  
Toastmasters  
taught her to

# SPEAK UP!

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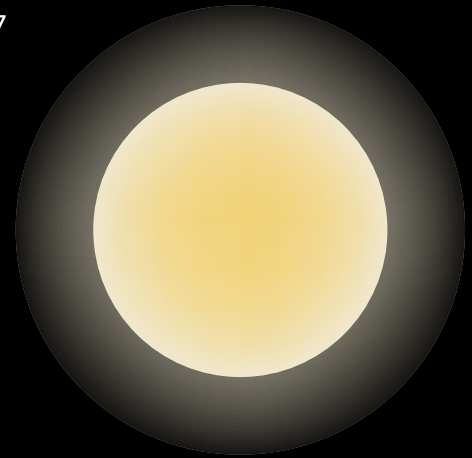
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### TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL MISSION:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE

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## Experiencing the True Toastmasters Spirit

In August 2023, at the start of my term as International President, I encouraged everyone to rediscover who we are as Toastmasters, how we best serve the members of our clubs, and how we can be empowered to fulfil our potential.

The year has flown by and we have faced those opportunities. The Board of Directors has been exploring what Toastmasters International is in a post-pandemic world and guiding us toward a future where we are building on Dr. Smedley's vision.

There are always highs and lows. Thankfully the lows have been few and far, outweighed by the highs.

I have joined club meetings around the world, both online and in person, including one where they asked me to read aloud my own Viewpoint article! I have seen members thrilled to win speech contests and others take bold steps into leadership, and I've seen others face disappointment when their plans didn't work out. I've met guests and new members who saw the potential of Toastmasters and longtime members who had devoted much of their life to their development and service in Toastmasters.

## Kindness leaves an impression on our hearts.

On visits to District conferences, many members rediscovered the joy of fellowship. I met a woman in Sri Lanka in her 80s who is one of the members testing our Pathways enhancements. For me she epitomizes the Toastmasters spirit: dedicated volunteers giving of themselves to ensure each member gets the best experience.

I was also struck by the kindness of our members: Allegra who drove me everywhere in Georgia; the District team in Sri Lanka who welcomed me at the airport in the middle of the night with flowers; Fiona in New Zealand who opened her home and let me do laundry; and Ian in Australia who had a bagpipe player bring the sound of my native Scotland to make me feel at home.

Acts of kindness are all around us.

Dorothy from the United Kingdom told me how she declined the invitation to be Area Director as she didn't drive, and the clubs were not easy to reach. A club mate said they would drive her wherever she needed to go and so she became an Area Director.

Kindness leaves an impression on our hearts and makes us want to extend the same to others. Let us be kind whenever we can.

Thank you to all Toastmasters around the world, for the honor of serving as your International President. Let us shape the future of our world as we rediscover and develop ourselves, as we serve with kindness.

**Morag Mathieson, DTM**  
2023-2024 International President

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## Snapshot



**KDU TOASTMASTERS CLUB** of Ratmalana, Sri Lanka, hosts an outdoor meeting with the theme “Laugh-a-thon” in Kuruwita, Sri Lanka.



## Traveling Toastmaster



**SHANNA DAVID** of Carapichaima, Trinidad and Tobago, and **NORMAN LUM HEE** of Garland, Texas, visit Key West in the Florida Keys.



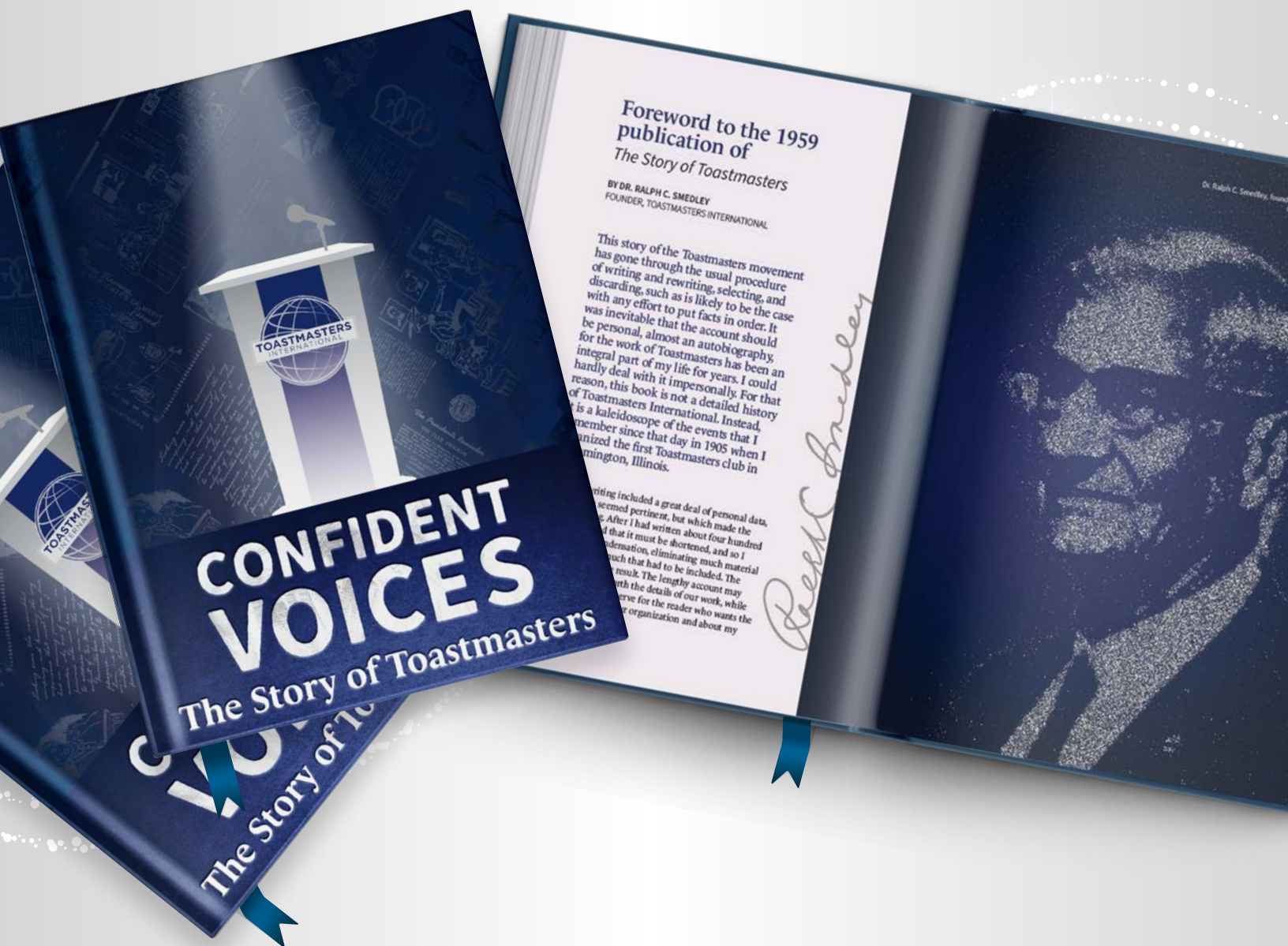
**RABI SHRESTHA** of Butwal, Nepal, shows off the Toastmasters International logo while visiting the Maya Devi Temple in the Lumbini Province in Nepal.





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# A Symbol of Hope

Olympian runner uses her Toastmasters skills to speak out for fellow refugees.

By Mackenzie Eldred

“The Olympic Games, and sports in general, have not only been an avenue to nurture my talents, but a much-needed voice to share my experience.”

—ROSE NATHIKE LOKONYEN

When Rose Nathike Lokonyen was 8 years old, she and her family fled South Sudan when a civil war broke out in their village in 2002.

They made their way to the neighboring country of Kenya, arriving at the Kakuma Refugee Camp. Lokonyen and her nine younger siblings lived in the camp for almost 20 years.

During that time, her parents had returned to South Sudan in search of Lokonyen’s grandparents, and later learned they had lost their lives in the war. For eight years, Lokonyen didn’t know if her parents were alive until a group of journalists found them in their former village and brought them back to Kenya.

“Life in a refugee camp has a lot of challenges and it wasn’t easy for us, but we have to overcome and aim for a better future,” Lokonyen says.

Lokonyen found that future through running, which she started doing for fun in high school at the refugee camp, competing in inter-school competitions and races. In 2015, she ran barefoot in a 10-kilometer race, placing second. A few months later, she was invited to train for the Olympics at the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation in Nairobi, Kenya.

Lokonyen trained with about 40 other refugees two to three times a day, Monday through Saturday, for eight months. The training was difficult and nothing like her experience running in the refugee camp. After being told she couldn’t run barefoot like she was used to, she told her coach she couldn’t train and needed to return to the camp.

Despite the challenges, Lokonyen pushed through and, in 2016, she was selected as one of five South Sudanese runners for the first-ever Refugee Olympic Team. She placed seventh in the 800-meter dash, and served as the flag bearer during the Opening Ceremony in Rio de Janeiro.

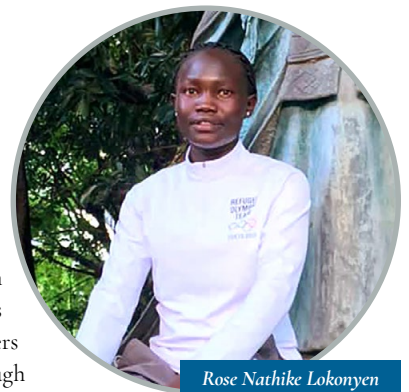
“We were so happy because when we entered the Maracanã stadium, all the people were cheering for [the refugee team],” she says. “I think that was the most important thing because we are the voices of other refugees. It gives us this symbol of unity, life, and togetherness.”

Lokonyen also competed in the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and says competing as an Olympian has given hope to other refugees around the world. “It shows that being a refugee is just a status. Whatever [other] people can do, a refugee person can do too, despite the circumstance they are going through.”

## Speaking Out for Others

Since taking part in the 2016 Summer Olympics, Lokonyen has inspired many by sharing her story of strength and resilience. She has served as a keynote

speaker, a representative for other refugees, and in leadership roles as a Toastmasters member. Through her advocacy for refugees, she often discusses how sports can benefit others who have been displaced.



Rose Nathike Lokonyen

“The Olympic Games, and sports in general, have not only been an avenue to nurture my talents, but a much-needed voice to share my experience,” Lokonyen said at the 2018 Social Forum in Geneva, Switzerland, where as a delegate she discussed how sports could be used to promote human rights. “The involvements of the refugee community in sports continues to inspire the 68.5 million forcibly displaced people.”

Lokonyen was also invited to speak at the 2018 Formal Consultation on the Global Compact of Refugees, where she discussed global policy-making processes that would support refugees.

“[Refugees] need to be given a chance to be their own voices,” she says.

As Lokonyen continues to speak out for those in need, she credits Toastmasters with helping build her confidence. “I’ve been to so many countries traveling, being a keynote speaker for the refugees around the world, and it’s helped me a lot. Toastmasters helps me improve my communication skills, confidence, and knowledge.”

She first joined DIC Toastmasters, a hybrid club based in Chicago, Illinois, in 2021, after receiving a scholarship to Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario, Canada. Within the first two years of her membership, she served as the Club Secretary twice and placed third in the Area speech contest.

Lokonyen, who currently serves as Area 21 Director for District 103, is studying to be a social service worker so she can support others in need. “As long as you can work with people, that is what matters,” she says.

With her public speaking skills, education, and Olympic experience, Lokonyen will continue advocating for refugees around the world. “My dream is to achieve my goal of helping people one day in the future and giving back to my community.”

**Mackenzie Eldred** is editorial coordinator for the *Toastmaster magazine*.

# From Social Anxiety to Confidence

How Toastmasters helped me become a confident speaker.

By Sofia Haarderup

I have been shy as long as I can remember. It has been persistently by my side like an unwanted companion—ensuring that I feel fear and anxiety in every social situation. Ensuring that I feel embarrassed and ashamed for not conquering those irrational beliefs and illogical thinking patterns which are standing in the way of living a normal life.

For those of us with social anxiety (social phobia), every day is a battle often endured in silence and hidden from everyone, including friends and family. You might ask yourself, *isn't everyone shy at some point?* True, but there is a difference. If you are shy, you feel reserved or uncomfortable in social situations. If you have social anxiety, you experience *extreme* discomfort and will go to great lengths to avoid those interactions because they can cause unsettling symptoms like heavy sweating, blushing, rapid heartbeat, and feelings that leave you paralyzed and uncomfortable.

When I was 10, I hoped that my blushing and self-hatred thoughts would go away with age. I was looking forward to being able to speak up in class or say something at the dinner table without my mind going blank. I didn't want to worry about humiliating myself in front of my schoolmates or family members.

However, when I was 20, it was evident that nothing had changed. In fact, I was experiencing severe anxiety daily in different situations at and outside of work—when eating lunch with colleagues, when introducing myself at a meeting, when paying for my groceries with the cashier. The fear of turning red did not help either, and this could trigger the anxiety before the actual event. An easy option was avoiding the situations where I felt anxious, which only fueled the self-criticism further and was a short-term solution.

In my late 20s, things began to change! A few years earlier, I had started working at the pharmaceutical company, AstraZeneca in



Sofia Haarderup

Gothenburg, Sweden. A friend and colleague took me to a meeting at the company's Toastmasters club, the West Coastmasters Speech Club. This meeting was a turning point for me. I witnessed the warmth and supportive atmosphere of the club with new members and those who had been

The fact that Toastmasters is a training ground without judgement gave me the confidence and reassurance that I could try new things without failure.

with Toastmasters for some time. I instantly felt this was a place I could safely rest in myself and practice speaking in front of an audience, all at my own pace.

After joining the club, what surprised me was that deep down I enjoyed speaking

onstage and discovered I was actually quite good at it. I believe the reason for daring to practice in the meetings was the unconditional support to try, and try again. I was encouraged to sign up for a role at each meeting despite not having tried the role previously. I quickly learned that fellow members were more than happy to guide me through the process and offer advice.

The fact that Toastmasters is a training ground without judgement gave me the confidence and reassurance that I could try new things without failure. Thanks to further encouragement and support, I volunteered for the Vice President Membership role the following year and later became the President.

There is no miracle cure for shyness. But there is no doubt that Toastmasters works—offering a perfect opportunity to go onstage and be listened to. We don't have to fight to be heard like we might have to at a workplace meeting where people are loudly voicing their opinion. Being onstage makes us visible, and we will be listened to regardless. I sometimes refer to my Toastmasters meetings as “therapy sessions.” Just like cognitive behavior therapy, you are exposed to your discomfort in a supportive environment gently pushing the boundaries a little further out of your comfort zone.

It has been just over 20 years since I went to my first Toastmasters meeting. I am still convinced that joining Toastmasters is by far the best investment I have made, both in my private and professional life. I have even taken it a step further by acting in my spare time. Without my Toastmasters training, I would not have dared to go onstage. Today, I have developed from an anxious speaker to a confident one, and I have Toastmasters to thank for it!

**Sofia Haarderup** is a member of Saturday Breakfast Speakers Club, an advanced club in Gothenburg, Sweden.



# Leading Without Being the Leader

3 ways to guide and inspire teams.

By Bill Brown, DTM

**M**uch of the leadership training within Toastmasters has to do with leading a team. These skills are particularly applicable within the corporate environment. But what if you aren't particularly oriented toward being a team leader? What if you are not in a position to be one? Is it possible to be a leader without being *the* leader?

Yes, and let me suggest at least three ways this is true.

The first is being a **thought leader**.

I think of a thought leader as one who takes the body of knowledge in a particular area to the next level. They may be building upon existing knowledge or thinking outside the proverbial box. This kind of leadership could even involve taking a complicated topic and repackaging it in a form that is simple to understand. Basically, thought leaders are those who think for themselves and advance thought in a positive direction.

I have been to many training sessions in my day. Occasionally, I hear something new, but all too often the trainer is repeating what has been said before. This is particularly true in the home-based business arena. There is nothing wrong with this. Their audience needs to hear the information. And good for the trainer for teaching them. But this does not mean that this person is a thought leader.

A thought leader doesn't just repeat what their mentor has taught them—they carry it one step further.

As a speaking-skills trainer, I am not particularly innovative when it comes to speechwriting. But I tend to push the envelope

in the delivery area. Sometimes a lot. Does that make me a thought leader? Maybe, maybe not. I hope so.

A second type of leader is an **inspirational leader**.

This is a person who, by their performance, behavior, or level of attainment, inspires others to follow in their footsteps.

We see this a lot in the sports arena. In the most recent season of women's college basketball in the United States, Caitlin Clark, a star player for the University of Iowa Hawkeyes, had an outstanding year. She set scoring records and made her team one of the best in the nation. And, in the process, inspired many young girls to take up that sport and work hard to achieve a high level of success.

She has seen that she is an inspirational leader and has embraced that role. You can also be inspiring people without even knowing it. Who are you inspiring?

A third type of leader is the **mindset leader**.

This leader influences the mindset, mental framework, and attitudes of others, whether positively or negatively. They correct, orient, and guide the culture of the team. Have you ever heard someone say, "That's not how we do it here"? That is mindset leadership.

Years ago, a baseball player joined a professional team that I followed. The team had not been successful in a while, but this player came over from a championship team. During his new team's pre-season training camp, someone played a trick on him that he did not appreciate. It wasn't that he couldn't take a joke. He was serious about being successful and

it was obvious the other player was just there to have fun. He came down on the team hard and turned the mindset around. They became success oriented. And they went on to win the World Series championship. This player changed how the team thought and was a true mindset leader.

An inspirational leader, by their performance, behavior, or level of attainment, inspires others to follow in their footsteps.

Whether you realize it or not, you, too, may be a mindset leader. You don't even have to be in a position of leadership to be one. Are you positive, and supportive of the team's objectives? Or are you negative, and always complaining? Either way, you could be a mindset leader. Obviously, one type of leadership is helpful to the team and the other is not.

The thought leader needs to have some expertise in an area. Inspirational and mindset leaders do not. They can influence an individual or an organization just by their attitude and effort.

In fact, they may not even be aware of the influence that they are having.

That is why we need to be careful about what we say and do. Our attitude, our comments, and even our posture and demeanor can have a tremendous effect on the success or failure of a team.

What effect are you having? After all, you are a leader.



**Bill Brown, DTM**, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette. Learn more at [billbrownsspeechcoach.com](http://billbrownsspeechcoach.com).

# Inspiring Trust as a Leader

Create a cohesive team with consistency and vulnerability.

By Lauren Parsons, DTM

Over the course of 42 seasons, Mike Krzyzewski led the Duke University men's basketball team to being a fixture on the American college basketball scene. Much like in any organization or Toastmasters club, where people come and go, Coach K (his nickname), took players from different backgrounds, decade after decade, and shaped them into a highly effective team.

How did he do it? By focusing on one thing: building trust.

In his book *Leading with the Heart*, Coach K says, "In leadership, there are no words more important than trust. In any organization, trust must be developed among every member of the team if success is going to be achieved."

He took time to meet with players one-on-one to build connection and get them on the same page. In team meetings, he'd invite them to speak so it wasn't just their coach saying "We should do this," but the players themselves who helped create the team culture. They had a set of team standards, which Coach K carefully influenced to bond the team together.

## The Benefits of Trust

Trust is critical in any group of people working together, from sports teams to work committees to your Toastmasters club. Creating a safe, high-trust environment gives people the confidence to speak up. It makes guests feel comfortable and more likely to return to your club and become members. At work, it lifts staff performance, well-being, and retention.

A Google study showed that psychological safety is the number-one key to creating a high-performing team. Without it, clever, capable, well-meaning people may not share their observations or ideas, even when their contribution could have made a difference. To build it you need to encourage people to speak up, make it okay to share conflicting ideas, and even celebrate failure.

Think of trust as a psychological safety net that helps people feel safe and confident that they won't be punished or embarrassed for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a different opinion.

The ideal team environment is challenging but not threatening. Leaders who create a safe, high-trust environment ensure their team members can focus and get on with what needs to be done, rather than expending energy worrying about their own security or position within the team.

## How to Build Trust as a Leader

Trust doesn't happen by accident—it needs to be built and maintained over time. Trust is all about perception, which is based on your behavior. A study by the Canadian military defined four pillars of trust: competence, integrity, benevolence, and predictability.

Reflect on how well you display each of the four pillars and how you can improve them. Practical ideas for a regular audit include:



▪ **Competence** – Remain curious. Keep learning. Welcome regular feedback.



▪ **Integrity** – Communicate your values. Explain your thought process behind tough decisions. Always do the right thing. Be transparent.



▪ **Benevolence** – Take 10 minutes a day to get to know a team member more. Practice active listening skills. Remember details and ask how Tommy's big game, Jessica's recital, or their wife's surgery went. Keep notes and reminders if you need help keeping track of these things.



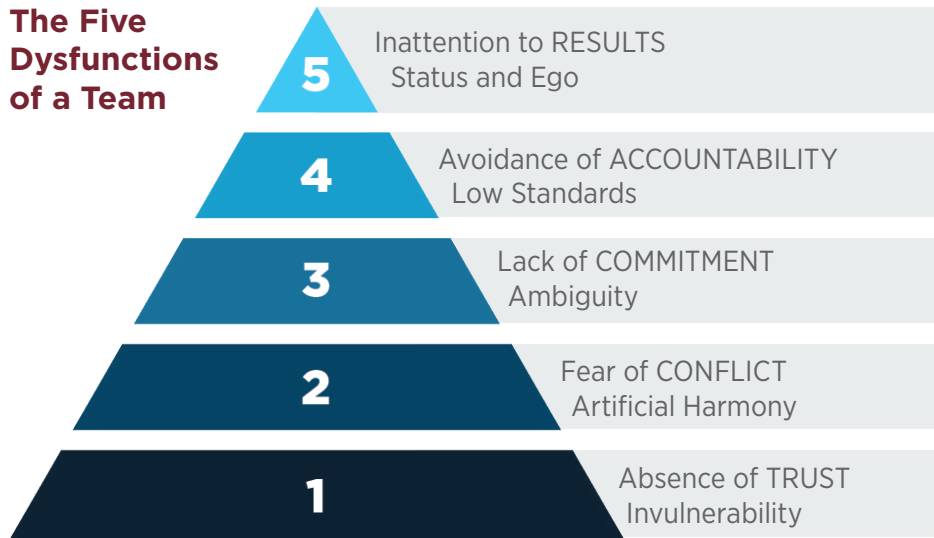
▪ **Predictability** – Be prepared and on time. Have consistent rituals, such as walking around the office as soon as you arrive or opening your meetings with a question of the day. Follow through on promises and communicate if things change.

Interestingly, when a leader lacks two of the pillars, they are considered fatal flaws. Nothing destroys trust more than a lack of benevolence (making people feel like you don't care about them) or a lack of predictability (being inconsistent).

You can be a capable, competent person, with good



## The Five Dysfunctions of a Team



integrity and show up consistently, but if your team doesn't feel you care about them, they will not trust you. Likewise, if you're competent, have integrity, and genuinely care about your team, but you're unpredictable—being easygoing one day, short-tempered the next and inconsistent in your decision-making—it's difficult for your team to trust you as they can't predict how you'll respond or what you'll do next.

### Be Bamboo

Leaders are people, too. You don't need to pretend to have it all figured out 100% of the time. In fact, doing so is counterproductive. It's your humanity and your story that will help people relate to you and build trust.

Have the strength to be a bamboo leader—organic, real, and flexible—rather than a tower leader—stoic and immovable. Tower leaders pretend they're always on top of everything and can come across as robotic, distant, and unapproachable. This breaks down trust.

One of the most powerful things you can do for your team is show up authentically and be prepared to share your imperfections. Admit when you don't have the answers, be willing to ask others for input, and if you get something wrong, apologize. These actions require courage. They also inspire people to trust you and encourage your team members to do the same with each other.

Yes, as a leader you need to filter certain things. Don't weigh your team members down with all your personal problems, but where it's relevant, share how you're feeling. Being able to say, "I was disappointed we missed out on

that project," or "I'm feeling a bit under the pump today," gives people permission to also share how they're doing, rather than pretending they're always feeling fantastic.

### Sharing Your Story

Reflect on the challenges you've faced throughout life and the key learnings you've taken away. Imagine you're mining your life story for the gold nuggets that will equip and inspire others.

Practice sharing part of your story in speeches at your club meetings. Bring the story to life with dialogue, movement, and by expressing your emotions through your voice, body, and facial expressions. Most importantly, share what *others* can gain from your experience by summarizing your key takeaway in one memorable statement.

Great leaders use storytelling as a powerful way to communicate and build connection. The more you practice it, the more impact your story will have at work. You'll have the confidence to naturally share part of your story in a team meeting or as part of mentoring conversations.

Trust that sharing your authentic story will help you connect with others, and in turn build their trust in you, significantly enhancing your relationships.

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**Lauren Parsons, DTM**, is an award-winning Wellbeing Specialist, New Zealand's Keynote Speaker of the Year and Educator of the Year 2023/24, TEDx speaker, author of *Thriving Leaders*, *Thriving Teams* and *Real Food Less Fuss*, and host of the Thrive TV Show. With over 20 years' experience she is a sought-after speaker who helps organizations create a positive, energized team culture, where people thrive. Visit [LaurenParsonsWellbeing.com](http://LaurenParsonsWellbeing.com).

## Vulnerability-Based Trust

Patrick Lencioni, author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, says that leaders need to build vulnerability-based trust. He describes it as "the kind of trust that comes about when people on a team can and will genuinely say things to one another like:

- ◆ I don't know the answer.
- ◆ I need help, I think I really messed this up.
- ◆ I'm sorry—what I said yesterday was totally out of line and I apologize."

A lack of trust is the first dysfunction that stops teams performing effectively. Without a foundation of trust between colleagues, it's impossible to have robust discussions and positive conflict—the sort of frank, open, yet respectful conversations that people can only have with those they implicitly trust.

If I say, "I think we should do 'XYZ,'" and you reply, "No, I don't think you've considered 'ABC' and here's why," we have the opportunity to create better outcomes. Without this candor, people can't contribute fully, and opportunities are missed.

In high-trust teams it's safe to air ideas—even conflicting ones—and explore all the options. Without this, there's a lack of commitment to decisions (because people don't feel they've had a chance to be heard), which leads to a lack of accountability and ultimately, poor results.



# An Introduction to Masterful Introductions

Your first words are an invitation to more meaningful connections.

By Matt Abrahams

Mastering the art of introducing oneself in professional settings is akin to unlocking a door to myriad opportunities. Effective introductions go beyond merely stating your name and occupation; they encapsulate your essence, aspirations, and the unique value you bring to the table.

For almost three decades, I have been helping people hone their communication skills as a teacher, coach, and now a podcast host. Over the years, I have discovered and developed tips to help people make memorable introductions that resonate across cultural and professional landscapes. I call this the “What, So What, Now What” framework.

## Crafting an Effective Introduction

First impressions are critical in setting the stage for future interactions, often dictating the trajectory of professional and personal relationships. We know from psychology that primacy effects—what we hear first from someone—impacts, anchors, and frames everything that follows. A memorable introduction is not just an exchange of names but an invitation to explore professional identities and shared values.

For example, consider Anika, a software developer, who introduces herself at tech meet-ups by highlighting her recent project, “Hi, I’m Anika, and I developed an app that simplifies project management for nonprofits.” This introduction not only shares her profession but also allows her to express her passion, inviting interest and conversation. It is a strong introduction because it provides details and uses memorable language.

An impactful introduction includes several key components: your name, your professional role, and an engaging piece of information that sets you apart. Think about things you are passionate about, accolades you’ve received, or aspirations you have. Take, for instance, Raj, a graphic designer with a focus on sustainable solutions. He might introduce himself as, “I’m Raj, a designer who’s passionate about creating environmentally friendly branding materials.” This approach not only conveys his profession and specialty but also his personal commitment to sustainability, making his introduction memorable, differentiating him from others, and inviting further discussion.

## The “What, So What, Now What” Framework

This framework is a simple yet effective structure for crafting powerful introductions:

- **What:** State who you are and the roles you fill. For example, “Hi, my name is Shozuki, and I’m deeply committed to social justice.”
- **So What:** Express what excites or interests you. For instance, “I believe we are all better off when we hear from diverse, engaged voices.”
- **Now What:** Extend an invitation for the other person to engage further in the conversation. If you’re at an event, an example could be, “I’m curious to know what brings you here.”



This framework not only structures your introduction in a memorable and engaging manner but also paves the way for a deeper connection by inviting immediate dialogue. The clarity and concision this structure affords the recipients with clear hooks for follow-up questions. A necessary part of effective conversation is setting up your partner to easily respond and the framework does just this.

## Navigating International Networking

Introductions are not only needed for networking events, but also when you need to introduce yourself to a larger group of people, for instance at a speaking event.

In 2023, I was invited to present an education session on spontaneous speaking at the Toastmasters International Convention. I knew the audience would be from all over the world, and I also knew that having a compelling introduction for yourself is particularly crucial in diverse and dynamic environments, such as the convention.

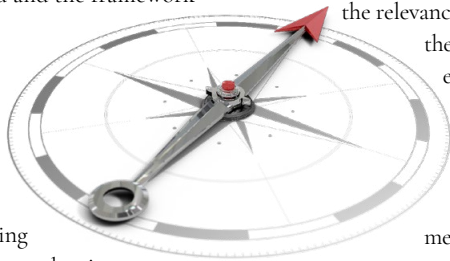
In these types of global settings, the importance of crafting culturally sensitive introductions cannot be overstated. Adapting your introduction to align with cultural norms can significantly enhance its reception.

Effective introductions encapsulate your essence, aspirations, and the unique value you bring to the table.

At that event, the diversity of the audience presented me with a unique opportunity to practice authentic, contextually relevant introductions. Leveraging the “What, So What, Now What” framework, I tailored my presentation’s introduction to highlight my passion for communication and leadership, core themes of Toastmasters.

- **What:** I began with, “Hi, I’m Matt, and I’m super passionate about communication.”
- **So What:** I continued, “I love helping people express themselves more effectively.”
- **Now What:** I concluded with, “I’m excited to know what motivates you.”

This structured approach not only facilitated deeper connections but also underscored the relevance of my introduction to the event’s focus, enhancing engagement among attendees. By inviting others to share their motivations, I was teeing up an easy way for them to connect with me and others.



Effective self-introduction in professional networking is about more than sharing basic information; it’s an opportunity to make a meaningful connection, share your unique story, and pave the way for future opportunities. By using a structured approach like “What, So What, Now What,” every introduction can be a moment of impact, leading to enduring professional relationships and collaborative ventures.

**Matt Abrahams** is a lecturer at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business, the author of *Speaking Up Without Freaking Out* and *Think Faster, Talk Smarter*, and the host of *Think Fast, Talk Smart: The Podcast*.

## Nervous About Networking?

Use these tips to soothe the jitters.

**1 Focus on the physical.** First, take deep belly breaths, filling your lower abdomen, making sure to exhale twice as long as the inhale. Next, channel your natural adrenaline by using big, broad gestures and step forward toward your audience. Third, hold something cold in the palms of your hands, which serve as thermoregulators for your body in order to reduce your elevated body temperature brought about by your increased blood pressure. Try invoking a mantra before you speak that reminds you that your message has value, such as, “I have value to bring.”

**2 Reduce the pressure.** High expectations can make spontaneous speaking more difficult by increasing performance anxiety. Lessen the stress by reminding yourself that other people are there for the same reason you are. Networking can feel awkward and unnatural, but remind yourself of your value. Reducing pressure actually frees you to communicate in a more relaxed and authentic manner.

**3 Take time to listen.** Networking is a time to meet new people and learn from them. If you’re constantly selling yourself, you’re missing the opportunity to talk to people you may not have met otherwise. It’s a time to share insights with other people in your industry. Ask relevant questions to understand different companies and teams.

To listen in a more focused manner, slow yourself down and become more present in meetings, in conversations, and onstage. Take a deep breath and get yourself into a mental state where you can be engaged and curious. This shifts you from defense to being more receptive and open, and leads to better understanding.

For more tips to think faster and talk smarter on the spot, read Matt Abrahams’ article “[Improve Your Impromptu Speaking](#).”

# THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

Verbal and nonverbal communication come together to create influence.

By Elizabeth Danziger

**T**hink about some of the most successful leaders you've known—perhaps a boss, a teacher, a Club President, or a committee chair. Chances are they share some common traits. As you develop your leadership skills, it's helpful to reflect on leaders whom you have most respected, and try to verbalize what made them so impactful.





During my many years working as a consultant for business communications, I've found three characteristics that nearly all strong leaders share: a sense of integrity, the ability to respond to feedback, and strong communication skills.

## Integrity

Successful leaders show integrity in all their actions, meaning they behave consistently with their values and take responsibility when things go wrong. This kind of integrity leads naturally to authenticity, which makes people feel that when the leader speaks, they reflect their true thoughts and values within the boundaries of professional presentation. Having integrity shows up in other behaviors too, such as being on time for meetings and not interrupting others.

## Ability to Receive Feedback

Effective leaders welcome input from other people in the organization. They show a willingness to receive feedback by asking open-ended questions such as, "How do you feel about what I'm saying?" or "Can you tell me more about that?" and using inclusive language that incorporates "we" and "I." If there's a disagreement, they don't get upset or dismiss the person's observations. A good leader will pause and try to assess what their team members are trying to convey, perhaps by saying, "Let me be sure I understand you. What I think you said is 'XYZ.' Is that right?" or "Can you help me understand that better?"

## Strong Communication Skills

Perhaps the most crucial trait of a good leader is that they are able to get people to listen when they speak. Strong communicators use clear language to ensure everyone understands the message, and they avoid trite buzzwords and jargon.

Ivan Rosenberg, Ph.D., who has trained over 4,500 leaders in his leadership development workshops, says, "A leader creates the

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## Successful leaders behave consistently with their values and take responsibility when things go wrong.

possibility of a future that wasn't going to happen and enrolls others into taking action to fulfill that future." In other words, strong leaders create a concept of a future outcome and draw people toward it through their example and their language. It isn't just the verbal part of communication that makes a difference, the nonverbal part is just as important. Rosenberg emphasizes that leaders' behavior sets the tone for the whole organization. If leaders make excuses when they make mistakes, they create a company of cover-ups. If they are always late, others assume it's okay to be late, too.

### Verbal Behavior of a Leader: What Do You Say?

As you develop your leadership skills, the most impactful tool you can use is your words. Your words matter, and that includes not only what you say but how you say it.

If you're trying to connect with a new team, ask questions or play appropriate games to figure out what the interests and strengths of your team members are. Try ice breaker activities to learn more about people's experience and ways of communicating. Another effective strategy is to use storytelling to bring people together. This is particularly useful if you have stories that align with the goal of the team or can describe a challenging situation that ultimately led to a successful outcome.

Jargon and buzzwords, such as "low-hanging fruit" and "thinking outside the box," can lead to confusion or a sense of not belonging for people who don't know the terms. You will win more confidence using clear and straightforward language than spouting the latest business jargon. The same rule applies to acronyms: Be sure to identify them the first time you use them. For example, don't describe the program year and refer to the "DCP." Explain the Distinguished Club Program so new members can understand it, then introduce the acronym.

How you say your words can be just as important as what you say. When you are addressing a group—even during a simple get-to-know-you session—speak clearly and audibly, pronounce your words clearly. If you are in a diverse group, avoid using local dialects that may not translate to your entire team.

Vocal tone is key. To project a sense of leadership, your tone should be strong. A hesitant tone implies uncertainty or lack of confidence. End declarative sentences by pitching your voice downward at the end of each sentence. Treating statements as if they were questions leads to a damaging speaking habit called "upspeak." People practicing upspeak seem to be asking for the listener's approval with every sentence. For many listeners, this habit is distracting, even annoying. Drop the last syllable; do not inflect upward.

Your vocal tone says volumes about your feelings. Imagine all the ways that a person could answer "fine" to the question of how they are feeling. Someone might brightly say, "Fine!" and you'll know they're having a good day. Another might say "Fine" curtly and you instantly know that they are not fine at all. If you struggle with people misconstruing your words, try listening to recordings of yourself speaking or asking for feedback from your Toastmasters network.

### Physical Presence: Looking the Part

Verbal communication is only one aspect of the language of leadership. When you stand in front of people, your audience or team is making snap judgments about your competence, professionalism, and credibility before you even open your mouth. These judgments happen instantaneously, usually at a subconscious level. Your posture, clothing, facial expression, gestures, and other factors must present a consistent sense of leadership.

A leader's physical presentation should be consistent with the culture and values of their organization; for example, Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, is well known for wearing hoodies to major meetings. However, those hoodies are of excellent quality, clean, and fit him well. When he was called to testify before U.S. Congress, Zuckerberg donned a suit—demonstrating that he knows how to dress appropriately for his environment and is able to adapt as a leader.

Your physical appearance can be empowering or disempowering. To project an image of power, stand up straight, but don't be rigid. Keep your hands open at your sides unless you are gesturing naturally. Be sure to smile at your audience—sometimes it helps to choose a friendly face in the audience and smile at them. Make your smile genuine, however; plastering a grin on your face will make everyone wonder what you're hiding. That said, you need to understand the situation and circumstances in which you're speaking. If you're addressing something serious, such as a bereavement, disaster, or impending layoffs, a smile would be inappropriate. The secret is to read the room and respond authentically.

Movement is another powerful tool for leaders. Move intentionally. If you stride across the stage, do so in order to speak to both sides of the room—not because you're feeling antsy. As you move, keep your hands loose at your sides.

Eye contact is another key for connecting with people. In large groups, scan the room and focus on just a few individuals. Then, scan again, noting whether people are still paying attention or have started surreptitiously staring at their phones. If you feel you are losing the audience, change your physical position—stand up if you are sitting down or vice versa. Take a quick poll. Ask a question. Jolt them out of their apathy. In smaller groups, look at individuals with a friendly expression, smiling authentically when the occasion suits.

To retain a strong presence, avoid fidgeting, keeping a stiff posture or facial expression, or playing with your hair,

jewelry, or clothing. If you ask others to share their thoughts but then stand with your arms crossed and a stern expression, your listeners are likely to clam up. Whenever your body language contradicts your words, people will believe your body language.

If you feel that maintaining a straight, open posture is uncomfortable—and many beginning speakers feel this way—try practicing in front of a mirror or at your Toastmasters club. Most people are not born knowing how to present themselves professionally. It's a learned skill, and Toastmasters is an ideal place to practice and master various techniques.

### Dealing With Sensitive Issues

If you're wondering how best to speak to team members under challenging circumstances, remember three words: professional, friendly, and respectful. If you include those three factors in your communication, you won't go wrong. For example, suppose a team member is upset that they did not receive an expected promotion. You can listen actively and empathetically, showing you comprehend their frustration. Encourage open dialogue, letting the person express their feelings and thoughts. Respect their sentiments.

You can then calmly explain some factors that went into management's decision without disclosing confidential information. Then, you can respectfully offer to work with the person to create a career development plan that might lead to future promotions.

This approach—listening, reflecting the other person's message, explaining the situation, and looking toward the future—will help you deal with a wide range of potentially distressing issues.

Developing the language of leadership requires self-awareness.

Be mindful of your strengths and weaknesses. Work to improve yourself. As the Toastmasters year gets off to a start, integrate this knowledge into every speech, meeting role, and club officer interaction. By consistently maintaining the personal, physical, and verbal qualities of a leader, you will discover that the language of leadership becomes natural—because you are becoming a leader.



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# Use Your Message to Inspire

Are you laying bricks or building a cathedral?

By Ben Guttman

It's not about the task. It's about the goal.



One day long ago, an architect visited the worksite of his project and saw three bricklayers busy at work. He asked each of them what they were doing. The first worker brusquely replied, “I’m working. I’m laying bricks.”

The second coolly answered, “I’m building a wall.”

The architect turned to the last bricklayer, who was the most productive of the bunch. The worker smiled, stood tall, and said, “I’m building a great cathedral.”

All three bricklayers were doing the same thing. But different framings resulted in different outlooks and behaviors. When communicating as leaders, it’s vital to get the framing right.

If you’ve used a camera with a lens that you can swap out, you’ll know how this works. Lenses of different focal lengths can dramatically change how your photo looks. Sometimes you view the big picture, and sometimes you zoom in on the details.

Correspondingly, leadership communication can be sorted into two categories: inspired or directed. One isn’t necessarily superior to the other, but to become most effective, you need to use the right one in the right circumstance.

## Inspired and Directed Messages

Inspired messaging speaks to goals, ambitions, and shared values. We inspire our team by speaking of whatever our version of a “cathedral” is—Google doesn’t make a search engine; it organizes the world’s information, and Coca-Cola doesn’t make beverages; it refreshes the world.

When pitching big ideas, use your camera lens to zoom out. It’s not about the task. It’s about the goal.

Psychologists have found that our most difficult goals can elicit our highest levels of effort and performance. These lofty ambitions outperform vague “do your best” instructions, partly because our best is subjective and we don’t even know what it is. We know when the cathedral is built, but do we know if we really did our “best” in laying bricks? The inspired goal organizes our efforts around something we can all agree on.

This is not to say that directed messaging has no purpose in our work. You wouldn’t tell a cab driver to “follow their heart” when driving you home, and you need to document specific requirements with suppliers. We’ve all been in situations where we’re frustrated by the lack of direction from a higher-up. Leadership calls for more inspired messaging, but management calls for more directed messaging.

This distinction maps closely to something you learn in sales: the difference between features and benefits. People don’t buy features, they buy benefits—how does this thing make life better? Theodore Levitt, a former Harvard Business School professor, best summarized this idea when he said, “People don’t want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole!”

## Inspired Leadership in Action

Like the bricklayers, there’s a similar fable of U.S. President John F. Kennedy touring a NASA facility, where he stopped to ask a janitor what his job was. The janitor responded, “I’m helping put a man on the moon.”

Kennedy used a big-picture vision and inspired wording in his 1962 speech that led to that man on the moon, and that speech is a brilliant example of selling the hole instead of the drill, of inspiring rather than directing.

At the time, the polls showed a majority of the public was not supportive of this literal moonshot. But one moment in his speech changed everything. Kennedy said, “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.”

This speech is effective as rhetoric and as a sales pitch. Kennedy also spoke about rocket engines, guidance systems, and salaries and facility costs. But that’s not the part that is remembered. Instead, the part that stirred hearts was about the benefits—the reason why: landing on the moon would mean a “win.”

The message worked. Over the next few years, the U.S. committed over \$25 billion toward the Apollo program—one of the most expensive projects ever undertaken. On July 20, 1969, all that money, motivation, and engineering paid off as the first humans set foot on the moon’s surface.

When he needed to motivate and persuade, Kennedy zoomed out and spoke in the language of inspiration, not direction. That’s why the janitor wasn’t just a janitor—he was part of the space race. That was Kennedy’s “cathedral.” What’s yours?

**Ben Guttman** is a marketing executive, educator, and author. His new book, *Simply Put: Why Clear Messages Win—and How to Design Them* is available from Berrett-Koehler Publishers. More at [BenGuttman.com](http://BenGuttman.com).



# A New Global Alignment

Growing member diversity sparks a shift in regions.

By Paul Sterman

On July 1, the first day of the 2024–2025 program year, Toastmasters International’s global structure changed. The shift reflects the organization’s evolving demographics, as more and more members from outside North America have joined the organization in recent years. Consider: Toastmasters’ total membership is now almost equally split—50.5% in North and South America, 49.5% outside that area of the world.

Thus, the new alignment, which equally divides the 14 Toastmasters regions, making seven of them inside the Americas, and seven outside. (See the map on the next page for the geographical breakdown.) Before this latest change, nine of the regions were inside the Americas (two more than now), and five were outside (two less than now).

The 2024 alteration better balances the distribution of the more than 14,000 Toastmasters clubs in the world. According to the organization’s bylaws, no single region can represent more than 15% of all clubs. As part of the realignment, certain Districts will be reassigned to new regions. You can view the [region maps and District list](#) to see if your District has been reassigned to another region.

The updated alignment, designed to anticipate future growth as well, means there will be more equality for members across the globe both in terms of representation on the Board of Directors and opportunities to serve on the Board.

Toastmasters International President-Elect Radhi Spear, DTM, says the move will be a boon for the organization.

“With an even split of clubs in the Americas and abroad, our Board will have more diverse representation, which is fantastic! A diverse Board broadens our perspective, as members with different backgrounds and experiences contribute a wider range of ideas and solutions,” says Spear, of Piscataway, New Jersey. “This enhances problem-solving and decision-making processes.”

Spear and Morag Mathieson, DTM, 2023–2024 International President co-chaired Toastmasters International’s Region Alignment Committee, which studied the alignment issue for about six months in 2023 and recommended the new structure to the Board of Directors.

## Alignment History

In Toastmasters’ first decades of existence, the organization’s membership was primarily centered in North America. In 1960, Toastmasters was composed of eight

regions, all in North America. There were two International Directors from each region, 16 in all.

Over the next half-century or so, Toastmasters became more and more international, reaching into dozens of countries outside of North America. Yet the regional structure remained the same: eight regions, all in North America. In 1980, the organization added the Director-at-Large position on the Board, which would be held by someone outside of North America. However, the regional structure remained entirely in North America, with Toastmasters in all other parts of the world grouped into the category of “Districts Not Assigned to a Region.”

That all changed in 2009. That’s when a hotly debated realignment plan called Global Representation and Support—Proposal A—was put to members for a vote at that year’s Annual Business Meeting at the International Convention. The proposal called for a new global structure of 14 regions: 10 of them in North America, with one also featuring some clubs in South America; the other four regions outside of North and South America.

Advocates of the proposal wanted equality for all Districts around the world, rather than a structure that favored Districts in North America. Others wanted the longtime alignment maintained, including the traditional regional conferences (which didn’t exist for members outside North America).

Supporters of Proposal A prevailed—barely. Two-thirds of the votes were needed for the proposal to pass; at the convention’s Annual Business Meeting, 8,912 votes were cast in favor of the realignment plan, representing 69% of the total.

The region realignment, which took effect in 2010, included a new number of International Directors: 14, one from each region, providing more representation on the Board than before for members outside the Americas.

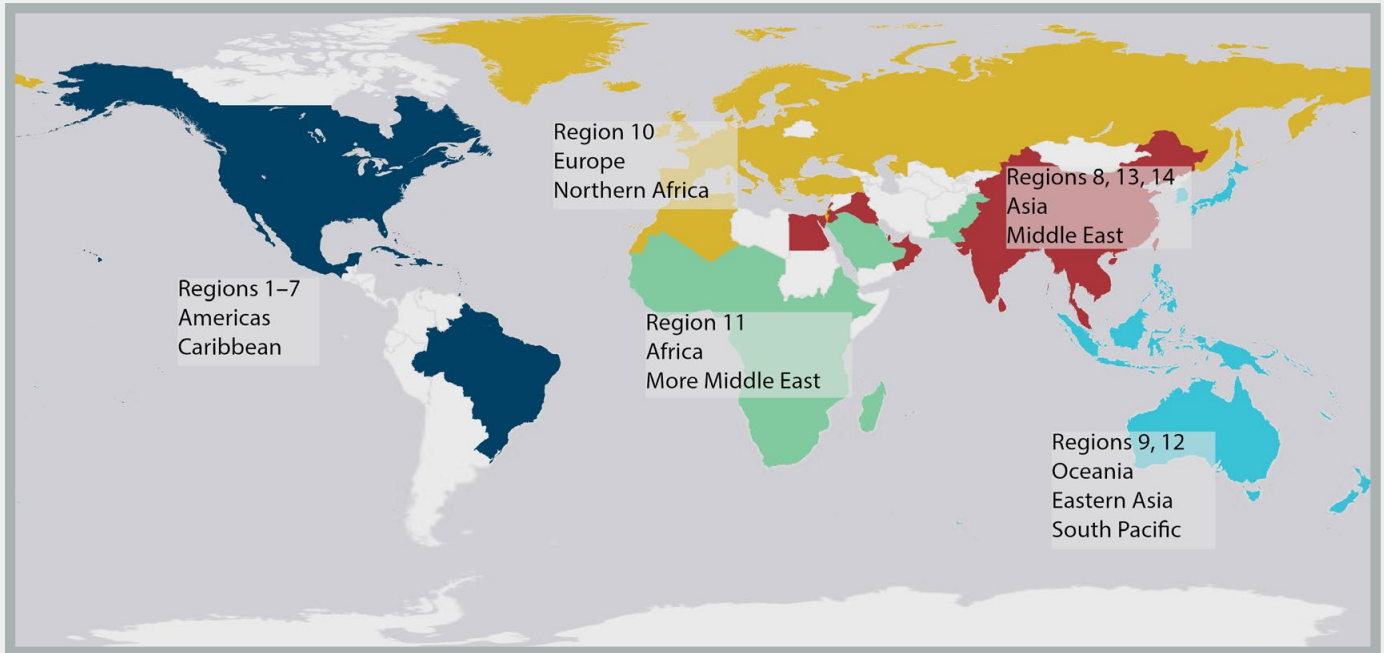
## More Demographic Change

Toastmasters growth in the 2010s surged around the world, with a major increase in clubs in places like Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. This led the organization to add another region outside the Americas in 2018 (to five of the 14 in all).

And now, the latest alignment: seven regions inside the Americas, seven outside.

“Seeing this evolution brings the realization of the dedication and commitment of so many members over the years building clubs and bringing the benefits

## 2024 Reformation Map



Map showing Toastmasters' new 14 regions

of Toastmasters to an ever-increasing population all around the world,” says Mathieson, a longtime Toastmasters leader in Europe and a resident of Bavaria, Germany.

The number of International Directors will remain the same: 14, one from each region. But the geographical composition of where Directors are from will change because of the new structure.

“A diverse Board can better represent and understand the needs and interests of our diverse membership base,” says Spear, “leading to more relevant and effective strategies that increase our global reach.”

Toastmasters' continued expansion into other countries has been one of its greatest

“A diverse Board [of Directors] can better represent and understand the needs and interests of our diverse membership base, leading to more relevant and effective strategies that increase our global reach.”

—RADHI SPEAR, DTM

successes. As Past International President Tim Keck, DTM, wrote on the occasion of Toastmasters' 75th anniversary in 1999: The organization's mission has always been to bring “the Toastmasters gifts of communication and leadership to diverse groups of people around the world.”

With this alignment, the organization fully embraces its international evolution.

To learn more, visit the Toastmasters webpage on the [2024 region realignment](#).

**Paul Sterman** is senior editor, executive and editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*.

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# Managing Team CONFLICTS

How effective communication can help you succeed together.

By Greg Glasgow

One of the benefits of working in today's world is the opportunity to interact with others and work as a team. Strong teamwork can build positive cultures and produce better work, but with this comes the need for effective communication.

With a 20-year history in Toastmasters leadership and a long career in civil engineering, Jaap Russchenberg knows how important it is for teams to maintain good communication. When a team communicates well, he says, its members work more efficiently, get things done more quickly, and create better relationships with clients.

"Team communication can make or break a project," says Russchenberg, DTM, a member of Leiden Toastmasters in Oegstgeest, Netherlands. "Relationships are the most important characteristic for the well-being of a project, and communication is at the core of relationships."



That's why when Russchenberg starts a new project—in business or in Toastmasters—he takes time to establish a united team that agrees on priorities and sets ground rules on how to communicate. Priorities for a well-functioning team can include setting project deadlines, sharing regular updates, and establishing metrics for measuring success, he says. Among the ground rules to consider are respecting other team members, showing up on time to meetings, listening to each other attentively, and making sure feedback is constructive.

“The most important part is not the goal at the end, but how you get there,” he says. “You have to first think about, ‘What is important for us as a team? What are our values?’ You have to understand people’s personalities and build up trust.”

## Communication Breakdowns

Despite your best efforts to build a high-functioning team rooted in good communication, workplace conflicts can still arise, often because communication breaks down. For example, if you see a rise in missed deadlines, or if you find that multiple people are unknowingly working on the same task, something has gone wrong with communication.

Communication breakdowns happen when preferences or decisions aren't explained well, when instructions are unclear, or when team members are more focused on making sure their opinions are heard than actively listening to others and attempting to understand their positions.

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“If you have trust in a team, it's easier to talk about a conflict and understand why it's happening.”

—JAAP RUSSCHENBERG, DTM

A conflict might arise when a coworker keeps attempting to communicate with you after work hours about non-urgent matters. Or one member of a team may get promoted, leaving other members with feelings of jealousy or resentment. In either case, clear communication can help alleviate the issue—asking that coworker why they need to message you after hours, for instance, or explaining what it was about a worker's skill set that led to them being promoted.

Whether the cause is team disagreements or unclear directions, communication problems need to be rooted out early to keep a project running smoothly.

“It often happens when a person says ‘yes’ but does ‘no’—the team agrees on a direction, but someone decides to do something different,” Russchenberg says. “Trust is a very important part of a project or in a team, and if someone is not a part of the team anymore, the team will fall apart.”

Especially if a team is made up of people who haven't worked together before, building trust early is vital to its success. A team whose members



trust one another collaborates better, has better morale and productivity, has stronger bonds, performs better, and has a greater sense of respect. Those qualities, in turn, can help prevent communication problems, Russchenberg says.

“Conflict doesn't have to be something terrible. Conflict can be a disagreement or misunderstanding,” he says. “If you have trust in a team, it's easier to talk about a conflict and understand why it's happening.”

## Know Your Style

One key to open and productive communication among team members is understanding each person's communication style. Understanding your style and how it meshes with others' goes a long way toward successful meetings and conversations. The Toastmasters Pathways project “Understanding Your Communication Style” discusses four styles that indicate how someone prefers to deliver and receive information.

Direct communicators like to get to the point quickly and in a succinct manner; initiating communicators value interacting with others and sharing stories; supportive communicators appreciate a calm, steady approach; and analytical communicators like facts and figures.

A direct communicator who leaves time for an initiating communicator to tell a story about their weekend may find more success, for example, as would a supportive communicator who includes a few data points in their suggestion to an analytical communicator. To identify someone's communication style, experts recommend evaluating body language as well as the actual words someone uses when they speak. If you're hearing



a lot about data and tactics, for instance, you are likely talking with an analytical communicator.

“If team members working together understand their own styles, as well as one another’s, it can go a long way,” says Monique Levesque-Pharoah, DTM, a Toastmasters International Director from 2016 to 2018, and a conflict-resolution expert based in the Canadian province of Manitoba.

### Focus on Interactions

Levesque-Pharoah trains Toastmasters leaders in a conflict-resolution style known as the interaction model, which is based on the understanding that everyone approaches situations differently and puts a focus on mutual understanding. One element of the interaction model is the intent-action-effect framework—the idea that every visible action has an unseen intent and an unseen effect.

“At the heart of most conflict is not understanding someone’s intent and reading into their intent based on your own opinion,” says Levesque-Pharoah, a member of Vital Words and We Believe in Winnipeg Toastmasters clubs, both in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

The interaction model provides a simple template for approaching someone about a communication problem. Using “I” statements and sticking to facts, the person instigating the conversation should state what they noticed, how they interpreted the action, and how that perception

made them feel. It’s a noncombative way of starting a dialogue that has the potential to provide answers and even deepen relationships.

Levesque-Pharoah gives the example of a time she had a disagreement with a colleague late in the workday. The following morning, her colleague said “Good morning” to everyone in the office except Levesque-Pharoah.

“Using the interaction model, I went to her, and I said, ‘I noticed that at the meeting last night, we were on different ends of a decision, and then this morning, you said good morning to the other people in the office, but you didn’t say good morning to me,’” Levesque-Pharoah says. “I interpret that to mean that maybe I upset you at the meeting yesterday, and now I am feeling stressed out, because that’s not how I want to be in my working relationship with you. Is my interpretation correct?”

It turned out, Levesque-Pharoah says, that her colleague’s 16-year-old son had been involved in a car accident the night before, and the insurance company called her as she was approaching Levesque-Pharoah’s office. The perceived snub was not intentional, and her colleague appreciated the opportunity to clear the air.

“Had I not been trained in that model I would have been consumed by my feelings, and things might have escalated from there, because you base your future interactions on past interactions,” she says. “A lot of the issues people have arise because they don’t understand people’s intent. They can only see the action.”



Understanding your style and how it meshes with others' goes a long way toward successful meetings and conversations.



Among Toastmasters members, misunderstandings of intent can happen more easily because people are coming from an even wider variety of contexts than in the average workplace—different levels of work experience, cultural backgrounds, ages—and because it's easier to assume everyone is on the same page.

Within Toastmasters, misunderstandings may arise when a member doesn't receive the feedback they were expecting during a speech evaluation, for instance, or if a club officer feels they are being ignored by another officer. Another common issue is role clarity, Levesque-Pharoah says—who sends emails and invitations? Who sets the agenda?

"We can fall prey to those pitfalls a little more easily in Toastmasters because we think, 'Oh, Kumbaya, we're all rowing the same boat. We're all going in the same direction. We don't have any problems because we all are singing from the same song sheet,'" she says. "But too often, we're on the same song sheet, but a different songbook. Our context really forms how we look at things."

## International Relations

Contexts can vary among people in the same office, but they can really vary among people from different countries. Working among Toastmasters teams in northern and southern Europe, Russchenberg has seen culture clashes that have threatened to derail projects, as people from countries that tend to subscribe to a top-down leadership style attempt to work with those from areas where team consensus is more often sought. When such clashes happen, he says, he brings the two parties together for a dialogue focused on listening rather than debating.

"The exercise starts with the person who has the complaint or problem, and they explain what the problem is," he says. "Then the other person has to repeat what the first person said, and then I ask confirmation from the person who stated the problem. 'Is that correct? Yes or no?' If it was not correct, they have to do it again."

In such a dialogue, he says, no one has to defend themselves. The goal is simply for the two parties to understand where the other is coming from.

"By focusing on listening, then people can ask questions, and many times the problems are solved in an easy way," he says. "It can be as simple as, 'Oh, I didn't know you meant it that way,' or 'I didn't know you felt that way or perceived it that way.'"

Other business leaders have additional strategies for managing conflict and communications breakdowns in the office, including scheduling check-ins with each employee, using active listening—a technique Toastmasters consistently practice in club meetings—and using shared documents to keep collaborations on track.

One such document available to Toastmasters is the [Early Detection Conflict Checklist](#) that Levesque-Pharoah helped to create. It assesses team interactions in categories such as communication, performance, and trust, with questions like "Are District leaders responding respectfully during conversations?" and "Are team members aligned on expectations?"

"I've used this document in other contexts, and it can serve as a great tool to determine team dynamics and if you are headed into negative conflict," Levesque-Pharoah says.

But Russchenberg and Levesque-Pharoah agree that the best way to solve communication problems is with better communication—getting people talking with one another to get to the root of the problem. Not only does the practice smooth the road for teams that may have to work together on multiple projects, but an open approach to confronting conflict can ultimately build stronger bonds among team members.

"Conflict always reveals a sunnier side, if you navigate it properly," Levesque-Pharoah says. "You can get to the truth and the heart of what people really need from a relationship. Conflict is almost always good when it's handled properly."

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**Greg Glasgow** is a Denver-based author and freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster*. His debut nonfiction book, *Disneyland on the Mountain: Walt, the Environmentalists, and the Ski Resort That Never Was*, was published in September 2023.



# The Area Director

This crucial and fulfilling role helps hone leadership, mentoring, and networking skills.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

The Area Director position is often hailed as “the best job in Toastmasters!” While this may sound like a recruitment pitch, many indeed find the role richly rewarding.

As Area Director, you are essentially the liaison between the District and its clubs—a vital link between these individual groups and the broader District leadership. You support and visit clubs, helping them meet their objectives, assisting club officers, and working with other District officers to aid the clubs.

## Benefits of the Role

Serving as Area Director offers hands-on leadership, communication, and organizational-management experiences that translate into valuable skills applicable across all facets of life. “I certainly gained mentoring and coaching skills, and even used some mediation and conflict resolution skills,” says Carolyn Becker, DTM, of the Lockyer Valley Toastmasters Club in Gatton, Queensland, Australia. “My listening, thinking, and presenting skills were greatly enhanced.”

The role provides ample opportunities to network with fellow Toastmasters leaders, which fosters personal growth and broadens your professional network. “I had positive experiences with most of the other District leaders,” says Chiara Ruggeri, of the Polito Toastmasters Club in Turin, Italy. “I helped other Area Directors organize their Area contests and received help back. I felt like part of a network and learned how others dealt with the same problems I did.”

Anjul Hans, DTM, of the PwC Talks Toastmasters Club, in Tampa, Florida, says the skills learned in the role helped him do his job. “I learned how to drive teams, train team members, and provide mentoring—all of this came in very handy when I started leading a team at work.”

Beyond personal gain, serving as an Area Director is an opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the Toastmasters community.

“For the District, this role is the first point of contact for the club,” says Hans. “This role ensures that club officers are trained and clubs participate in contests. Area Directors drive the overall health of the clubs.”



This role also provides opportunities for Area Directors to gain new perspectives and ideas by visiting other clubs. When I visited clubs as an Area Director, it was my first time attending club meetings outside my home club. Not only did I expand my Toastmasters network, but I also gained valuable insights by observing how other clubs conducted their meetings.

For example, some clubs had additional roles such as “joke master” or “listen master,” which added to the meeting variety. Other clubs had well-defined processes for guests and new members to encourage and engage them from the start. These observations sparked ideas that I could share with my home club and other clubs in my Area to promote a culture of continual improvement.

By providing support, guidance, and encouragement to club leaders and members, the Area Director helps to create an environment where individuals can thrive and reach their full potential as communicators and leaders. Serving in the role also fulfills the Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) requirement to serve as a District officer for one year.

## Collaboration and Teamwork

Do you remember the first time an Area Director came to visit your club? I thought that the Area Director was the President of Toastmasters International. I was clueless to Toastmasters’ organizational structure.

Here’s how the Area Director fits into the District organizational structure. (For a more detailed explanation, look at the [District Leadership Handbook](#).)

- **Club Leadership:** Club officers manage the day-to-day operations of individual Toastmasters clubs.
- **Area Directors:** Serving the clubs and club officers are the Area Directors. Each Area Director oversees four to six clubs within a designated geographical area. Their main tasks include supporting these clubs in achieving their goals, facilitating communication between the

“Frequent visits to my Area clubs helped form friendships and create a cooperative spirit.”

—NANCY ELLENSON

clubs and the District, and ensuring that the clubs operate effectively.

The Area Director’s role is supportive, not directive. “It’s important to keep in mind that we work for the clubs, not the other way around,” says Ruggeri, the member in Italy.

- **Division Directors:** Division Directors help the Area Directors. Each Division Director supports several Areas.
- **District Trio:** The District Trio (District Director, Program Quality Director, and Club Growth Director) oversees the entire District.

Area Directors collaborate closely with other District officers to support clubs and achieve Distinguished goals. The Area Directors within a Division will often support each other in sharing best practices, solving common problems, and helping at each other’s Area speech contests.

“Networking with other Area Directors gives a broader view of how things can get done (thinking outside the box) and who can help accomplish your goals,” says Nancy Ellenson, a member of the Star of the North Toastmasters Club in Warroad, Minnesota.

## Requirements

Prospective Area Directors should have experience in club leadership roles. Toastmasters International recommends that members first serve on a District Council (typically achieved by serving as a Club President or Vice President Education). Taking on these roles early in your leadership journey will maximize learning opportunities.

## Typical Responsibilities

These are ways that Area Directors can achieve the goal of supporting clubs.

- Complete Area Director training provided by your District to be as effective

as possible. Districts must submit Area and Division Director training reports by September 30.

- Complete an [Area Success Plan](#).
- [Visit each club](#) in the Area at least two times and submit Club Visit Reports on time. The visits are aimed at understanding what clubs’ needs are and offering them valuable and actionable feedback.
- Conduct Area Council meetings at least two times per year. Area Council members are typically the President and Vice President Education of your Area clubs, plus any assistants you may have.
- Communicate regularly with Club Presidents.
- Promote and facilitate club leader training.
- Conduct Area speech contests.
- Establish and support new clubs.
- Attend District Executive Committee meetings and District Council meetings.

## Top Tips

The list of duties may seem daunting, but you can consider it an opportunity to work on your time-management skills. Yves Prévost, DTM, of the Westfort Toastmasters Club in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, offers the following tips to stay on top of tasks:

- **Calendar planning:** Prepare a calendar of events for your Area and share it with your Area Council.
- **Dues payments:** Remind your clubs well ahead of deadline dates.
- **Document access:** Ensure that Area Council members know where to access documents such as the [Distinguished Club Program](#) manual and the [Club Success Plan](#).
- **Speech contest promotion:** Promote speech contests well in advance to ensure the full participation of contestants and contest officials. Share access to [speech contest forms](#).

## Overcoming Challenges

Life never goes exactly as planned, and neither will your service as an Area Director. Below are a few common challenges and ways to deal with them.

### Recruiting volunteers for Area speech contests

- Clearly articulate the benefits of volunteering for Area contests to encourage participation.
- Collaborate with fellow Area Directors or District leaders to share resources and support for contests.

### Engaging uninterested club leaders or weak clubs

- Conduct more than the required number of visits to foster open communication and establish rapport with club leaders to understand their concerns and motivations. You don’t have to limit yourself to the two required club visits. “Frequent visits to my Area clubs helped form friendships and create a cooperative spirit,” says Ellenson, the member in Minnesota. “This was especially noticeable during contest season and club officer training.”
- Tailor support and resources to address specific needs and challenges.

### Resolving personality conflicts

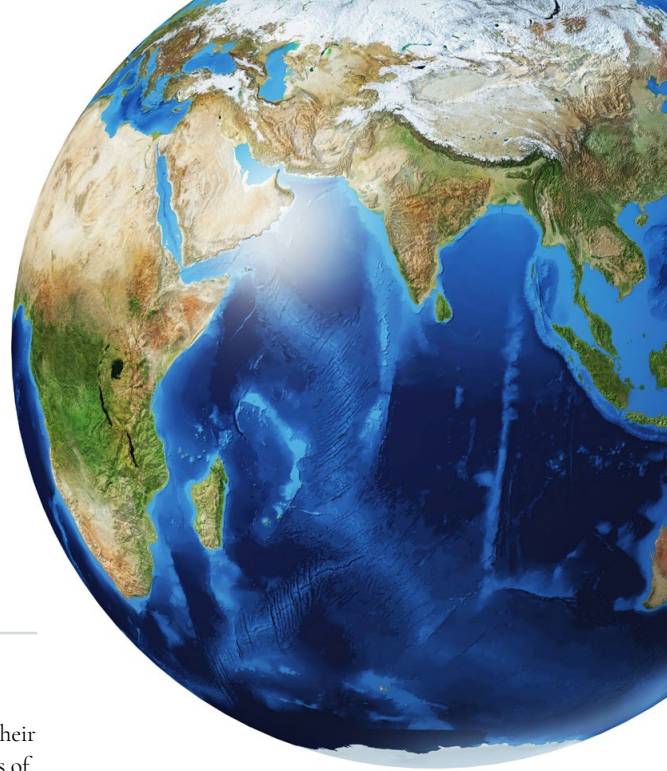
- Approach conflicts with empathy and impartiality, seeking to understand all perspectives involved.
- Facilitate constructive dialogue and mediation sessions to find mutually agreeable solutions.

In tackling this role, embrace challenges as learning opportunities rather than viewing them as failures, and seek support and mentorship from experienced Toastmasters. Make your service as an Area Director your “best job in Toastmasters!”

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**Diane Windingland, DTM**, is a communication coach from Spring, Texas, and a member of three clubs: *Frankly Speaking Toastmasters* in Spring, Texas, and *PowerTalk Toastmasters* and *Readership Toastmasters*, both in Minnesota. Learn more at [virtualspeechcoach.com](#).

# Inspiration From Past International Presidents



**T**oastmasters International Presidents have gained valuable lessons and insights while on their climb up the leadership ladder. Below, Presidents from the last 10 years share some words of wisdom that may inspire you on your own leadership journey.



“Real leadership comes into play when the unthinkable happens, when dark clouds loom in the sky, when storms are on the horizon, and the need for new leaders becomes a necessity.”

— Mohammed Murad, DTM, 2014–2015



“In my world travels I have urged leaders to have faith in people, to genuinely feel for them.

Belief can do a lot for an individual. Genuinely feeling for the individual can be life-changing.”

— Balraj Arunasalam, DTM, 2017–2018



“Leaders don’t run away from a challenge, they run toward it.”

— Richard E. Peck, DTM, 2020–2021



“To be strong as a leader or speaker, we need a base of knowledge, a place to practice our skills, and a way to get feedback on our performance. I can’t think of a better place than Toastmasters to access these three elements.”

— Jim Kokocki, DTM, 2015–2016



“Every leader has responsibilities to fulfill; every member has a role to support them. You have the opportunity to positively impact our organization through your personal leadership.”

— Lark Doley, DTM, 2018–2019



“In my experience, integrity starts from within. It is when your thoughts and actions are aligned, and your decisions are based on your values instead of personal gain.”

— Matt Kinsey, DTM, 2022–2023



“I know of no effective leader who is not also an effective communicator. Each individual skill enhances the other.”

— Mike Storkey, DTM, 2016–2017



“We transform from the ordinary to the extraordinary through the dedication and commitment of leaders who serve our clubs, Districts, and beyond.”

— Deepak Menon, DTM, 2019–2020



“I believe leaders are learners. There will never be a time when I know everything about leadership. I am eager to learn how to become more effective as a leader. Who we are now does not limit who we will be in the future if we are willing to learn.”

— Morag Mathieson, DTM, 2023–2024



# Shorter is Sweeter in Today's Emails

Ever wonder why people aren't responding to your memos and emails?

By Craig Harrison, DTM

Are people seemingly ignoring your emails? Are you waiting for recipients to respond to written requests with deadlines?

There could be a simple explanation: TL;DR.

If your missives are misfiring, it's likely they're too long (TL), and your audience didn't read (DR) them. Consider these approaches in your challenge to earn the attention of your readers.

## What's In It for Them?

Just like an effective speech, your writing needs to engage right from the start. Readers, like listeners, want to know what the topic is and why they should pay attention.

## Tick-Tock: You're on the Clock

Use your readers' time wisely; send them focused, precise messages. Your reward will be faster, more valuable responses.

The longer it takes you to get their attention, the more likely it is that your readers will lose interest. Remember, while it's rude to walk out of a boring speech, disengaged readers can—and do—easily give up and stop reading messages they're not interested in.



## Employ “Smart Brevity”

According to the 2022 book *Smart Brevity: The Power of Saying More with Less*, in writing, brevity is confidence.

The authors' formula:

- ◆ Grab your reader with your short powerful headline: tease, wow, scare.
- ◆ Next, what's the main idea and its importance.
- ◆ Then, explain why it matters to them.
- ◆ Bullets/numbered lists read best.
- ◆ Provide resources for a deeper dive (document, link, table, etc.).

Tips for getting your documents read and acted on:

- ◆ Taut is best.
- ◆ Optimal length of subject line: six words (best for viewing mobile phone screens); optimal length of main body: 200 words.
- ◆ Put your audience first. Write what they want or need to know.
- ◆ Use short, strong words and active verbs.

## Don't Bury the Lead

Here's another point about making your point. Don't “bury the lead,” a journalism term for failing to put the most important news first. Wading through lots of background or even a potpourri of pleasantries to start the message immediately puts off recipients. This type of message often masks your own lack of confidence in discussing the topic, a flaw your audience can often easily pick up on.

## Format Creates Focus

When I open emails to find one giant single-spaced block of dense text, narcolepsy immediately kicks in. The *thought* of deciphering tires me. It's like a jogger turning the corner and seeing a giant hill ahead.

Here's a way to bring readers in: Provide an executive summary up front to orient the reader on what is to come, and provide overall context for comprehending your message.

## MADE Messages

“When readers have the most important information up front, time and interest dictates how much or little they read!” asserts professional speaker and author Dianna Booher. “It's always better to summarize in a sentence or two or three at most, and put the action up front.” That's why she created The MADE Format, featured most recently in her book *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*.

- **Message:** State the bottom-line message of interest.
- **Action:** Make recommendations or state any follow-up actions you want from readers or that you plan to take.
- **Details:** Elaborate on the necessary details: who, what, when, where, why, how, how much?
- **Evidence:** Mention any attachments you're sending to make the message clearer or more authoritative.

Booher implores writers, “Don't tell me what you're going to tell me later on page four in the proposal. Tell me now; give me a summary.” Clarity begets more clarity, she says.

Whatever written form you're using, don't just dash it off without forethought. Think first, then write. You'll actually save everyone's time in the long run and are far more likely to generate your desired results.

**Craig Harrison, DTM**, a past District Director, is a professional speaker and coach who once buried his leads. He's since MADE over his delivery style to lead with the benefits, outcomes, and solutions. Learn more at [ExpressionsOfExcellence.com](https://www.expressionsofexcellence.com).



# Convention Fun!

The annual event has been an extravagance of exuberance through the years.

By *Toastmaster* magazine staff

**T**oastmasters International Conventions over the years have produced many milestones, showcased an array of top-flight speakers, and given members the chance to learn, network, and grow. They have also been a setting for celebration, fun, and sometimes spirited silliness as well (toga parties, anyone?).

## Fun Nights

Fun Nights became part of the convention tradition early in the 1970s and lasted through the 1990s. These evening festivities usually had a theme, which was reflected in the decorations, music, food, entertainment, and attire. The shindigs were also often tied to something the host city or area was known for.

The 1974 convention had a Roaring Twenties theme, highlighting the organization's founding 50 years earlier, in 1924. Convention-goers dressed as mobsters and flappers, danced to the music of the Dixie Ramblers, and participated in a jitterbug.

Other Fun Nights included themes such as Western World, Canadian Caper, and Maritime Masquerade.

## Proxy Prowls

Candidates for Toastmasters officer positions also got into the spirit. They turned to some unusual tactics to attract attention—and votes. The gimmicks included dressing up in campaign-themed clothing or using their children and families as campaign ambassadors. In 1982, one candidate hired a bagpiper to play, and the following year, another candidate had a dancer perform.

## Themed Costume Parties

Donning costumes was a big part of the festivities. For a “60s Fun Night” in 1995, attendees dressed up in tie-dye and hippie outfits. At a safari-style event, members wore pith helmets and khaki duds. An “All-Star Sports Night” drew celebrants in their favorite sports attire.

The 2000 convention in Miami Beach, Florida, featured a pirate-themed party. At the San Antonio, Texas, convention in 2002, the costume motif was “Denim and Diamonds”; cowboy hats and other Western wear abounded. A toga party highlighted the following year’s event, in Atlanta, Georgia.

## Music

The International Convention has provided some big-time entertainment over the years. At one point, musical acts included Chubby Checker—famed purveyor of “The Twist”—as well as The Shirelles, the first Black female group to top any record charts. Other well-known acts included country-music star Jerry Reed, the band Asleep at the Wheel, and Little Anthony and the Imperials.

Districts often led convention entertainment. Which is how “the Beatles” made an appearance one year. The band dashed onstage and performed at the 1964 convention in Denver, Colorado, but when they removed their wigs, the Fab Four were revealed to be The Denveraires, four members of the District 26 host committee who were in a quartet.

Ted Corcoran, DTM, 2003–2004 International President, started the Sing-Along tradition at the 1992 Las Vegas convention, and it soon became a convention favorite. It’s a chance for Toastmasters to socialize and sing songs from around the world together, including Corcoran’s signature rendition of the Irish ballad “Danny Boy.”

At the 2016 International Convention in Washington, D.C., The Water Coolers, a comedy troupe, wrote and performed a tune tailored for Toastmasters, based on the mega-hit “We Are the Champions” by the rock band Queen. The song’s title: “Toastmasters Champions.”

*In honor of Toastmasters International’s 100th anniversary, this is the eighth in a year-long series of articles commemorating historic milestones.*





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## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

*Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring* by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at



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